



A
S E R M O N

Preached before the Honourable

HOUSE of COMMONS

AT

St. Margaret's Westminster,

UPON

Tuesday the 30th of January, 1759.



Mercurii, 31 Die Januarii, 1759.

Ordered,

THAT the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Doctor *Ross*, for the Sermon by him preached Yesterday before this House, at *St. Margaret's Westminster*, and that he be desired to print the same; and that Sir *Richard Lloyd* and Mr. *George Onslow* do acquaint him therewith.

J. DYSON, *Cl. Dom. Com.*



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HOUSE of COMMONS,

A T

St. Margaret's Westminster,

U P O N

Tuesday the 30th of January, 1759;

B E I N G

The Day appointed to be observed as the Day
of the MARTYRDOM of King CHARLES I.

By *JOHN ROSS*, D. D.
PREACHER of the ROLLS.

L O N D O N:

Printed for C. BATHURST, opposite St. Dunstan's Church,
Fleet-Street. M.DCC.LIX.

SERMON

Preached before the Honorable

HOUSE of COMMONS

St. Margaret's Westminster



The Day appointed to be observed as the Day
of the Martyrdom of King CHARLES I.

By JOHN W. ROSS, D.D.
FELLOW of the ROYAL SOCIETY

LONDON

Printed by C. Bathurst, opposite St. Dunstons Church,
Fleet Street. MDCCLX.

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Tuesday the 30th of January, 1759.

H O S E A XIII. 9.

© *Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.*

THIS reply, which God condescends to make to *Israel*, contains a justification of the divine conduct with regard to man in general. It plainly suggests to us both the true cause of human misery, and the only remedy, which is proper to remove

move it. And, applied to the particular, events to which the solemnity of this day refers us, will give us an occasion,

In the first place, to recollect, with sorrow and concern, the calamities and misfortunes, which befel the nation at that time, through the violence of human passions and the neglect of self-government :

Secondly, to consider the insufficiency of human policy, at all times, to prevent the like calamities and misfortunes, without the influence of religion and protection of Providence : T A

And, lastly, to apply to ourselves, and our present situation, those lessons of instruction, which result from the whole. And let us proceed in this method with an intention and a desire of improvement. Let us lay aside prejudices for particular characters and parties, and examine into the conduct of all with a freedom which becomes *Englishmen*, and a moderation which becomes *Christians*. In a word, let us learn from the unfortunate experience of those, who have gone before us, to avoid the errors, which were committed by them : And from taking a view of the calamities and confusions, which arose from tyranny and enthusiasm, to set the highest value upon a constitution of government, which is regulated and administered by law ; and an establishment of religion, which derives its authority from reason and the gospel.

Encroachments

Encroachments upon liberty, and the undue exercise of power, were the beginnings of our national calamities. Extravagant claims on one side produced as extravagant claims on the other. And a spirit of violence and injustice, with the malignity of a general contagion, seized in its turn on every part of the constitution; and every part of it, at last, felt the consequences in the general ruin.

The King, unacquainted with his own prerogative, and unskilled in the arts of government, began the attack on the constitution, and invaded the most sacred and inviolable rights of his people. Arbitrary principles, which education had instilled into him, inclined him to attempt it; the flattery of those who had frequent access to him encouraged him to pursue it; and the fears of an obstinate and wicked ministry forced him to persevere in it, when the contrary might perhaps have been expected from his own judgment, and the natural mildness and equity of his own temper. The people on their part took the alarm. A spirit of liberty, ever jealous of encroachments and fearful of consequences, was excited amongst them. And a set of men, of unquestionable abilities and unsuspected integrity, stood up in defence of the national rights. They saw with grief the wounds, which had been given to the constitution, and heard the complaints of injured liberty. The voice of their country loudly called

on them for their assistance, and the danger, with which it was threatened, admitted of no delay. They took their resolutions at once. They determined to support it at the hazard of their fortunes and lives. And, without departing from decency and temper, acted with a vigour, which became the representatives of a free people, and the subjects of a limited monarch. And had they gone on with the same spirit, with which they began; had they conducted themselves by the terms of the constitution, and used only those means which were necessary to secure liberty, or to restrain prerogative: Their names would have stood foremost in the registers of fame, and would never have been mentioned in the *British* annals without the glorious addition of their being the vindicators of liberty and the friends of mankind. But, such is human weakness! through the heat of opposition they soon forgot the parts, which they had undertaken to act, and the characters, which they had assumed. The defenders of their country became leaders of factions. Ambition and resentment prevailed over integrity and patriotism. And the cause of freedom was supported only for the sake of establishing an unconstitutional power for themselves, and not for the sake of reducing the power of the crown to the spirit of the constitution. The largest concessions, which the King could make, had no other effect than to produce larger and more unreasonable demands from them; the strongest pledges, which he could give for the future security of liberty were unequal to their expectations;

expectations: and, in short, nothing less than the resignation of the whole royal power, and an entire change of the government, would satisfy them.

Disputes of religion aggravated and enflamed these civil contests: and the gospel of *Jesus*, which is a friend to the just rights of mankind, was made to speak the language of tyranny and rebellion. On the one hand; the leading Churchmen, yielding to their own passions and prejudices, and abhorring those of the Puritans, gave such an interpretation to the doctrines, and such severity to the discipline of the Church, as alarmed its friends, and furnished its enemies with the greater power and means to oppress it. On the other hand those, who had felt, the severity of ecclesiastical discipline, and had good reason to dislike it, through a spirit of independency and opposition, disclaimed all subjection and obedience, contemned what was due to decency in public worship, and opened the door to that wildness of enthusiasm, and those extravagant flights of fancy, which afterwards laid waste and destroyed * *the vineyard, which the right hand of God had planted, and the branch, which he had made so strong for himself*. In a word, superstition and enthusiasm were at work on both sides. They produced their natural and usual effect. And, though they set out on opposite principles, concurred at last to depress the dignity of

* Psal. lxxx. 15.

true religion, to imbitter men's tempers against each other, and to weaken the obligations, and lessen the regard to virtue.

And then it was, that the passions of the human mind broke loose from all the restraints of authority, and, like a deluge, overflowed the bounds, which were raised against them by reason and religion. Nothing was heard, in every corner of the land, but tumults and seditions and the melancholy preparations for a civil war. The prophetic description of the kingdom of the *Messiah* was inverted. Every man † *beat his plough-share into a sword, and his pruning-hook into a spear*; and found himself under the unfortunate necessity either of ranking under the opposite standards of loyalty and liberty, or of becoming a prey to the violent abettors of each in their turns. In short, the devastation and bloodshed, which accompanied the support of these two interests, united by the constitution, but rendered irreconcilable by the violence of human passions, ended at last in the ruin of both. The majesty of the crown sunk under the load of opposition, which was raised against it; and the sacred head of him, that wore it, was cut off by the hands of a common executioner. The privileges of the people were destroyed by the men, who had engaged to defend them. And the wise and well re-

† *Isaiah ii. 4.*

gulated

gulated constitution of the *English* government was changed into a most oppressive and lawless tyranny.

After this view of the calamities and misfortunes, which befel the nation at this particular time, through the violence of passion, and the want of self-government; let us, in the next place, consider the insufficiency of human policy, at all times, to prevent the like calamities and misfortunes, without the influence of religion and protection of Providence. And, I believe, whatever uncertainty may attend upon our other conclusions in politics; or however ignorant we may be of the particular causes, which produce many great revolutions in the world; it may be affirmed, without the least apprehensions of its being disproved by reason, or refuted by future experience, that public happiness can never subsist without social virtue and self-denial; and that neither of these can subsist, if men are uninfluenced by religion, or unawed by the terrors of conscience. The passions of men are violent, and, freed from restraint, will lead them to voluptuousness, injustice, and ingratitude. Their mutual interests are often opposite and contradictory; and being pursued will introduce factions, anarchy, and confusion. And nothing but the apprehension of a greater good, or greater evil, derived from superior authority, can restrain the one, or counterbalance the other. The wiser and more discerning part of mankind soon learned this from experience, and endea-

voured to apply the best remedy, which they could. They attempted to make private passions and self-interest subservient to the general good. And, in opposition, to the inclinations and prejudices of their fellow-creatures, persuaded the power of the many to submit itself to the direction of the wisdom of the few; and in this manner laid the great foundation of civil government; a foundation evidently laid upon the consent of mankind for the good of all; and upon which no building can be raised, that can be durable and lasting, but what is raised for the defence, protection, and security of the public.

The several forms of government, which were derived from this origin, took their colour and complexion from the characters of the people, and the characters of their leaders. They were fitted to answer the ends, for which they were intended, in proportion to the wisdom and integrity of both. But those, which were thought to be the best in theory and speculation, were found, upon experience, to be either impracticable or imperfect. The division of power; which was judged to be the best security against the exercise of lawless authority on the one hand, or the exercise of lawless liberty on the other, was liable to change. And the wisest institution of laws, however salutary and useful for the present, were unable to produce that stability and firmness of constitution in the political

political body, which is requisite to make it unchangeable and immortal.

Authority and liberty are both of a growing nature; and though they are necessary to the support of each other, and it is for their mutual interest, that they should be limited and restrained; yet unless they are moved by a spirit of benevolence and honesty, unless they are actuated by higher principles, than those of present interest, and unless the obligation to pursue the common good is supported by more sacred and inviolable sanctions, they will be making perpetual encroachments on one another. The rules and laws, which are made for the security of the one, will be looked upon as so many diminutions of the rights and privileges of the other; and there is little provision in politics to prevent, in a short time, the ruin and destruction of both.

The Legislature, indeed, by attending to the weak parts of the constitution, and by applying the remedies, which they have in their power, may perhaps remove the evil to a more distant time. They may prevent ruin from overwhelming themselves: but they cannot prevent it from overwhelming posterity. Good laws will retard the progress of corruption; but the best laws are imperfect in their direction, and weak in their influence. There are many acts of infinite concern to the general happiness, which human constitutions

tions cannot ascertain ; and several, which they cannot enforce. The most dangerous crimes, which may be concealed from the knowledge of the public, may be committed with impunity ; and others, which cannot be concealed, may, by cunning or corruption, elude the arm of justice. These, by repetition and indulgence, will soon introduce an habitual contempt of authority and public virtue. What was at first personal, will become universal. And an impatience of discipline, and corruption of morals, will be the general character of those, who govern, as well as of those, who are governed. And all, that can be done, either on one side, or the other, will be to invent expedients, and to compound with vice and folly, till expedients will at last be exhausted, and vice and folly will no longer admit of a composition, but destroy the constitution by one violent stroke ; and compel legal government and legal liberty to fill up the captive train in the insolent triumphs of confusion and despotism.

And we might here lament, and complain of the weakness of human nature, and, for want of some superior principle, we could do nothing else but lament, and complain, and submit to it with patience, as to a necessary evil. But our case is not so bad. We are furnished with a principle, which can communicate a stability to human governments, and supply the defects of human constitutions. We live under the supreme direction of a powerful, just, and good Being,

who interests himself in the affairs of men, and will never suffer wickedness to go unpunished, nor virtue unrewarded; and a conviction of this truth is big with the most important consequences to human life. It disposes men to every thing productive of common good; and no accidental circumstance in society can place any one out of the reach of its influence. It teaches them to be just and faithful in every public and private relation of life. It enjoins peaceableness and compassion in our whole behaviour; and restrains authority and liberty within their proper bounds. And, above all; it secures to us the favour and protection of him, in whom we believe, who alone ** ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.* And what condition of humanity can be conceived more happy and glorious, than that of a people living under a free government, and acting rationally on this principle? A people, who are all engaged in support of one common interest, and ever employed with a view to the common good? Whose domestic tranquillity cannot be disturbed by factions at home, nor public security endangered by enemies from abroad; whose industry is an inexhaustible source of wealth and power; whose pleasures are untainted with luxury and licentiousness, and whose devotion is not clouded with superstition and enthusiasm? May we not cry out with the royal Psalmist: † *Happy are the people that are in*

* Dan. iv. 17.

† Psal. cxliv. 15.

such a case ; yea blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God !

It is unnecessary to enlarge farther on a subject so well understood ; and it is time to consider what instruction arises from what hath been said. And if facts have been fairly represented, and conclusions fairly drawn, the most important advice is offered to all sorts of persons amongst us.

Those, to whom the reins of government are committed by the constitution, may learn from hence, that their own interest requires them to discourage vice and immorality and every indulgence of the human passions, which tends to weaken the authority and impressions of religion. They may learn, that no ideas of sacredness of character, nor any efforts of human wisdom, can secure them against danger from an irreligious people. In a word, they may learn to be moderate in the use of power, and never to encroach upon privileges ; since every abuse of power, and encroachment upon privilege, destroys the balance of government, and threatens the state with dangerous convulsions. And when the shock is once given, and such important interests as these are put in agitation, it is impossible for the ablest politician to ensure the event :
 * *The race will not then be to the swift, nor the battle*

• Ecclesiastes ix. 11.

to the strong, nor riches and favour to men of understanding and skill. The sudden starts of passion and extravagant resentments, which always arise, will interrupt the regular connection between causes and effects. And we can only conjecture from experience, that power will often change hands; and that the conclusion of the whole will at last be the subversion of legal government and the establishment of tyranny.

But the people may learn, from the same principles, that they are as much concerned in the support of religion as those who govern them. The *British* constitution of government hath been the glory of *Englishmen* for several centuries; but the enjoyment of its blessings in the largest extent hath been reserved to be the happiness of the present age. We are now in full possession of them; and the moderation of those, who are intrusted with power, frees us from any apprehensions of their being lessened by them. But the nature of these blessings is such, that every one is not fit to enjoy them. They require, like the best and most wholesom food, health and strength to digest and turn them to nourishment; and, like that too, if admitted into unsound constitutions, will be as hurtful as the most dangerous poisons. To speak plainly; they cannot be safely trusted with any but those, who are actuated by a principle of virtue; and virtue unconnected with religion is an uncertain principle, will soon be under the influence of

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self-interest

self-interest and ambition, and degenerate into the basest corruption.

The great blessings of our constitution are civil and religious liberty ; and, though the former implies legal authority and obedience, and the latter a settled establishment, yet neither can be secured from abuse without the concurrence of the people. They both suppose that the people are able to govern and chuse for themselves in several instances. The one hath left them to be the defenders of their own rights, and the other hath tolerated them in the choice of their own worship. But can a people immersed in vice and sensuality be capable of acting or judging for themselves in such important points ? Are they qualified to distinguish between the real and imaginary interests of liberty, or to discern the marks of true religion ? And may we not conjecture, from what hath once happened amongst us, that, under pretence of supporting them, they may overturn and destroy them ; and forge for themselves, with their own hands, the heavy shackles of slavery and superstition ? There will perhaps be an interval of anarchy and confusion between the two periods of liberty and slavery. The madness of the people will for a time range at large without controul. But it will soon spend its strength and subside. Men will not long live without government and without religion ; and, rather than have neither, they will be obliged to submit to arbitrary

bitrary power on the one hand, and to superstition and enthusiasm on the other.

Lastly, we ought all to be excited, by what hath been said, to reflect seriously on our own condition, and to be alarmed at it. Though we can boast that our constitution is arrived nearer to perfection than ever; though we are sure that our sovereign, whose great virtues we have experienced in a long and glorious reign, hath the sincerest regard to the interests of his people; and though we have the fairest prospect that his virtues will be continued to us in his royal posterity; yet we are not free from danger. We are engaged in a war abroad with a very formidable enemy, the event of which, notwithstanding our present superiority, is known to God alone; or, suppose it successful, it may still exhaust our spirits, and leave such a weakness behind it, that it may require a greater degree of virtue, than we can pretend to, to recover our primitive strength and vigour. And at the same time we are running at home, with eagerness and impetuosity, in that path to ruin, in which other great and powerful nations have ran before us; and, without the benevolent interposition of Providence and our own repentance, we shall meet with the same fate.

A disregard to religion is a distinguishing character of the age. This hath been the fruitful parent of a variety of evils, which have appeared in different

shapes amongst us. From hence hath flowed that contempt of authority, which hath broken out in libels against the most sacred character in the kingdom, and hath contributed greatly to lessen that esteem and reverence for government, which must be maintained, or society be dissolved. From hence must be derived that dissoluteness of morals, which hath explained away our obligations to virtue, and rendered the criminal nature of some vices problematical and uncertain. From hence must be traced that intemperance and love of pleasure, which weaken the constitution and impoverish the fortunes of all orders of men, and introduce an endless train of calamities into domestic life. From hence, in short, we have reason to apprehend, that we may soon reach the character of that people of antiquity, who are said, by one * of the best of their own historians, neither to have been able to bear the vices which oppressed them, nor the remedies, which were necessary to reform them. We are not yet, I trust, arrived at that high degree of political weakness. We have strength enough to struggle with our disorder and to bear the severest remedies. Our state is not so dangerous as to fling us into despair; but dangerous enough to awaken our attention and to alarm us. There are many remedies yet untried in civil policy, which may be provided against the fatal contingency. There are others of a religious nature more peculiarly

* Liv. lib. i. præf.

adapted to our circumstances and condition. We must refer ourselves for the former to those, who are the instruments of Providence in governing us: and we ought not, without the plainest reason, to distrust the wisdom and integrity of their direction. We must refer ourselves for the latter to the instructions of religion and the dictates of conscience; and our applications will certainly be crowned with success. Let us but reflect, that a spirit of irreligion hath been the principal occasion of introducing those evils amongst us: and surely it will appear, that the contrary spirit will be the most effectual means of removing them. A spirit of religion will teach us a dutiful submission to civil authority, as the ordinance of God; and will lead us to judge of the designs and actions of our superiors with candor and moderation. A spirit of religion will instruct us in the true nature of moral virtue, and illustrate the obligations to it in every instance. It will produce œconomy and frugality in our expences; sobriety and temperance in our pleasures; sincerity in our dealings with one another; and courage and bravery in the defence of our country. But when, I say, a spirit of religion, I mean the spirit of the gospel of *Christ*. For even the sober and considerate *Deist* must allow, that there is no prospect of this spirit being revived by any other method than that. Let him therefore consider, whether he ought not for the sake of the public to support and encourage it. Let him think, that by weakening the credit and authority of the gospel he weakens the credit

credit and authority of virtue. And let him reflect, that the fate of that and his country is so closely united, that the loss of the one will be the sad and melancholy presage of the ruin of the other.

To these reflections let the *Christian* add others of greater importance. Let him, who believes * *the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation*, consider, that motives of a different kind require him to be more † *zealously affected in so good a work*. Let him remember, that the ‡ *servant, who knoweth his Lord's will and doeth it not, will be beaten with many stripes*. Let him therefore no longer delay to do his own part in the great work of reformation. Let him reform himself, and endeavour, as far as his influence reaches, to reform others. And let him lead them by example, exhortation, and reproof into *the mercies of God* through the merits of *Christ Jesus* our Lord.

* Rom. i. 16.

† Gal. iv. 18.

‡ Luke xii. 46.

F I N I S.

